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DOH-PINELLAS REMINDS RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH WILDLIFE

CONTACT:

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St. Petersburg, FL – The Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County (DOH-Pinellas) urges residents to avoid contact with wildlife following the death of a six-year-old Florida boy who reportedly died of rabies after being scratched by an infected bat.

Bats are one of the main carriers for rabies among many other wild animals such as raccoons, skunks and wolves. Rabies is transmitted through exposure to the saliva and nervous tissue from a rabid animal through a bite, scratch or contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose or mouth.

Rabies is a viral disease that is nearly 100 percent fatal to humans. The good news is rabies is 100 percent treatable through quick response and medical care. The post-exposure treatment involves a series of injections to stop the disease before symptoms develop.

The best way to prevent rabies exposure is to avoid direct contact with wildlife and follow these guidelines:



- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick animals to health. Call Pinellas County Animal Services, (727) 582-2600, or an animal rescue agency for assistance.
- Never feed, pet or interact with wildlife or strays.
- Do not leave food outdoors for pets or wildlife.
- Do not install bat houses, similar to bird houses, to encourage bats to nest as mosquito prevention. If you have an influx of mosquitoes, make sure to drain and cover any standing water around your home or business. Keep pools and spas chlorinated and filtered, stock ponds with mosquito-eating fish. Report any mosquito problems to Pinellas County Mosquito Control at (727) 464-7503.
- Keep your pets' rabies vaccinations current to protect them from contact with wild animals that may be carriers. Your pet's vet or Pinellas County Animal Services can provide the vaccinations.
- Keep your pets under direct supervision in case they encounter strays or wild animals. Keep them in a fenced yard or on a leash. If a stray or wild animal bites or scratches your pet, seek veterinary assistance for your pet immediately.
- Report animal bites or scratches to Animal Services.

If you believe you may have been exposed to rabies, go to a hospital or medical treatment area or call 911. Next, call Pinellas County Animal Services and tell them everything you know about the animal. Never hesitate to seek medical attention when dealing with a possible rabies exposure.

For more information on rabies, go to <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>, or contact DOH-Pinellas at 727-824-6932.

For more information about DOH-Pinellas, go to www.PinellasHealth.com or follow us on Twitter at [@HealthyPinellas](https://twitter.com/HealthyPinellas).

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